



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

## Member Organizations

**The Umbrella Center for  
Domestic Violence Services**

Ansonia, CT

**The Center for Family Justice**

Bridgeport, CT

**Women's Center**

Danbury, CT

**Domestic Violence Program**

**United Services**

Dayville, CT

**Network Against Domestic  
Abuse**

Enfield, CT

**Domestic Abuse Services**

**Greenwich YWCA**

Greenwich, CT

**Interval House**

Hartford, CT

**Chrysalis Domestic Violence  
Services**

Meriden, CT

**New Horizons**

Middletown, CT

**Prudence Crandall Center**

New Britain, CT

**The Umbrella Center for  
Domestic Violence Services**

New Haven, CT

**Safe Futures**

New London, CT

**Domestic Violence Crisis Center**

Norwalk, CT

**Women's Support Services**

Sharon, CT

**Domestic Violence Crisis Center**

Stamford, CT

**Susan B. Anthony Project**

Torrington, CT

**Safe Haven**

Waterbury, CT

**Domestic Violence Program  
United Services**

## Testimony Regarding

### HB 7027, AA Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2019 and Making Appropriations Therefor

#### Judicial Branch

#### Appropriations Committee

February 22, 2017

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Senator Winfield, Senator Kissel, Representative McCrory and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those who serve them. Our members provide essential services to nearly 40,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

We urge you to protect funding for domestic violence services under the Judicial Branch Office of Victim Services (OVS) budget, including "Other Expenses" and the Criminal Injuries Compensation fund. The Judicial Branch has been faced with significant budget cuts in recent years that have substantially impacted the ability of the judicial system to respond to domestic violence. **Statewide domestic violence service data for FY 2016 demonstrates a 15% increase in court-based advocacy for victims, with over 29,000 victims served throughout the state.** We are grateful that OVS has worked diligently to identify options to continue to fund critical services for victims of domestic violence in spite of recent budget cuts, but we are deeply concerned that any further budget reductions will limit these options and potentially compromise victim safety.

Services supported by the Judicial Branch Office of Victim Services include:

- **Family Violence Victim Advocates in Criminal and Civil Courts and on Domestic Violence Dockets** – these advocates provide essential supports to victims navigating the court system including safety planning, counseling and court advocacy; funding provided by OVS in recent years as allowed the state's 18 domestic violence organizations to increase advocacy in civil courts to assist the more than 9,000 victims who annually seek restraining orders.
- **Adult advocates** – these advocates provide counseling, safety planning, assistance with accessing housing, systems advocacy for basic needs, advocacy with DCF, assistance with securing job training, and more – they are a critical component to comprehensive victim services.
- **Statewide Spanish Hotline** – the statewide Spanish hotline launched in October 2014 and has allowed us to better meet the needs of Spanish-victims by ensuring 24/7 access to a Spanish-speaking certified domestic violence counselor that can assist victims in a culturally-relevant manner.
- **Legal Services Partnership** – Judicial funding that is matched through fundraising by the state's 18 domestic violence organizations supports a partnership with legal services providers to provide legal assistance to victims with various civil court matters while the domestic violence organization provides case management.

Funding reductions to Judicial could result in the elimination of some or all of these services decreasing victim safety and access to services.

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### **Current financial realities of domestic violence services:**

In fiscal year 2016, **nearly 40,000 victims of domestic violence** sought help at one of CCADV's 18 member organizations. One in seventeen (**1 in 17**) of those **victims was housed in emergency shelter** because they faced physical danger and had no other safe place to go. Of the 2,325 people in shelter, **1,031 children were housed in emergency shelter with a parent**. Sixty-nine percent (**69%**) of **kids staying in shelter were 6 years old or younger**. Victims and their children receive life-saving services including counseling, support groups, safety planning and court advocacy.

Meeting the emergency housing needs of victims continues to be a challenge. There are 227 domestic violence shelter beds in the state and they are consistently full. **Shelter utilization has increased 119% over the past 8 years**, with the average shelter capacity at 57% in FY 2008 compared to 125% in FY 2016. Shelter capacity has increased largely because the **average length of time that a victim remains in shelter has increased by 77%** over the same time period (26 days in FY 2008 compared to 46 days in FY 2016). In many instances, to meet this growing need, families have to "double-up" in a bedroom or rooms that would otherwise be used communally for entertainment or relaxation end up converted into bedrooms. Neither option is ideal nor beneficial for victims seeking to overcome trauma. When the shelter space itself is stretched to the maximum, victims are housed in local hotels - a costly and unsafe option.

Increased knowledge about services through public awareness efforts and coordinated outreach efforts through programs such as the Lethality Assessment Program (a partnership with law enforcement), result in more requests for services. The length of time that victims remain in shelter has increased because victims are presenting to shelters with a host of complex needs ranging from severe financial abuse and a complete lack of access to monetary resources, to serious medical conditions or behavioral health needs. All of these challenges require additional supports from the domestic violence provider. Fewer recovery options and a lack of affordable housing continue to present obstacles that are growing increasingly difficult to overcome in a timely manner resulting in longer shelter stays and overflow. Until stable, appropriate housing can be identified and secured victims either stay in shelter or return home to their abuser – a potentially dangerous option.

The FY 2016 statewide domestic violence service data also shows sharp increases over the previous fiscal year in other service areas including:

- 5% increase in hotline calls
- 10% increase in community services
- 13% increase in support groups
- 15% increase counseling services
- 19% increase in community education and prevention

Again, we urge you to protect funding that keeps victims of domestic violence and their children safe.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

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